

STEPHANIE HERSETH SANDLIN
AT LARGE, SOUTH DAKOTA

WASHINGTON, DC
331 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
PHONE (202) 225-2801
FAX (202) 225-5823

<http://hersethsandlin.house.gov/>



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION, CREDIT,
ENERGY, AND RESEARCH
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GENERAL FARM COMMODITIES
AND RISK MANAGEMENT

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, CHAIR

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS,
FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENERGY
INDEPENDENCE AND GLOBAL WARMING

September 21, 2010

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Thomas Tidwell
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Chief Tidwell:

I'm writing to urge an increase in U.S. Forest Service funding for the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) in Fiscal Year 2011 to provide the resources necessary to respond effectively and aggressively to the growing mountain pine beetle epidemic in western South Dakota.

In December 2009, I led a bipartisan effort in the House with Representative Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming to oppose proposals to transfer and reprogram funds from the BHNF and other forests in the Rocky Mountain Region because I believed that funding was needed in South Dakota to increase mountain pine beetle mitigation activities. I'm glad that the proposal to transfer funds out of our region never gained traction, and that ultimately the Administration provided an additional \$2 million to the BHNF during Fiscal Year 2010, which allowed the U.S. Forest Service to perform increased thinning treatments to combat the mountain pine beetle emergency. Deputy Undersecretary Jay Jensen also visited the BHNF in August to tour areas of the forest that have been impacted by mountain pine beetles and to meet with affected local stakeholders. Both of these actions acknowledge the severity of mountain pine beetle challenge in the BHNF and indicate an appreciation for the threat posed by the mountain pine beetle to economic development in rural communities in our region.

As you know, despite Forest Service action, the current outbreaks of mountain pine beetles continue to pose great threats to the BHNF. These outbreaks are the largest and most intense in recorded history, affecting an estimated 356,000 acres of ponderosa pine in the last 13 years. The spread of the epidemic is now accelerating at a dangerous pace, with beetle infested trees showing up in new areas throughout the forest. This epidemic has created the potential for

SIOUX FALLS, SD
326 E. 8TH ST., SUITE 108
SIOUX FALLS, SD 57103
PHONE (605) 367-8371
FAX (605) 367-8373

RAPID CITY, SD
343 QUINCY ST., SUITE 102
RAPID CITY, SD 57701
PHONE (605) 394-5280
FAX (605) 394-5282

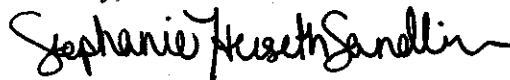
ABERDEEN, SD
121 FOURTH AVENUE SW, SUITE 1
ABERDEEN, SD 57401
PHONE (605) 626-3440
FAX (605) 626-3441

catastrophic fires that threaten communities, forests, watersheds, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and local tourism industries. For instance, the Mt. Rushmore National Monument recently announced that, for the second year in a row, the traditional Independence Day fireworks celebration will not be held because of concern about wildfire danger caused by nearby trees that have been killed by mountain pine beetles.

Due to the leadership of federal forest managers and the forest resource industry, as well as the engagement of local communities, there has been some progress in the BHNF in slowing the spread of the mountain pine beetle epidemic. However, I believe much more needs to be done to safeguard the BHNF and its communities. Investment now will save much greater costs in future if the epidemic is not adequately addressed. Estimates of the cost to mitigate the threats to public safety in areas in Colorado and other states recently ravaged by wildfire and mountain pine beetles now range in the hundreds of millions of dollars. I believe it's critically important that we make important investments in proactive mitigation and prevention in the Black Hills to arrest the spread of the beetle, and that these targeted investments be more cost effective in the long-term than rehabilitation and restoration following widespread wildfire damage. Therefore, I urge the U.S. Forest Service to provide the BHNF with adequate funding in Fiscal Year 2011 to meet the ever increasing challenge posed by the mountain pine beetle epidemic.

If you have questions or require more information, please contact Jon Loevner (202 225 2801, Jon.Loevner@mail.house.gov) on my staff. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie Herseth Sandlin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sandlin Stephanie Herseth
Member of Congress